



N E W S F O R I M M E D I A T E R E L E A S E

Feb. 6, 2012

State of the County Address

Frank T. Bruno, Jr., Volusia County Chair

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2012 State of the County address. Let me start by thanking a few people.

First, to the citizens of Volusia County, thank you for the privilege of serving as your County Chair for the past seven years. It has been a life changing experience.

Thank you to the Marine Corps League Detachment 1144 for the presentation of colors, and to Belinda Huttmann for another terrific rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. Belinda has honored us with her wonderful singing voice at several State of the County lunches, and her performance is always a pleasure and an inspiration.

I want to express my appreciation to Father John Bosco, pastor of the Catholic Church of the Epiphany in Port Orange, who will lead us in the invocation in just a few minutes. Also, to Daniel "The Saxman" Fuqua, who will provide the entertainment. And of course, the Ocean Center staff does a great job every year setting up for this event.

The State of the County would not be possible without the financial support of our community partners. If our sponsors could please stand one more time so we can give them a big round of applause.

I know we have many elected officials and managers from our municipalities here today, and I would like them to please stand and be recognized.

And of course, my colleagues on the Volusia County Council: We have worked very hard to do the people's work in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. I am very proud of all that we have been able to achieve.

Please stand to be recognized when I call your name and hold your applause until the end. First, Vice Chair and At Large Council Member Joyce Cusack; District 1 Council Member Andy Kelly; District 2 Council Member Josh Wagner; District 3 Council Member Joie Alexander; District 4 Council Member Carl Persis, and District 5 representative Pat Northey.

Our staff and management team, led by County Manager Jim Dinneen. The Council sets the vision for County government, but it is Jim who makes sure the work gets done. Jim is an outstanding County Manager, and we are fortunate to have him and our County attorney, Dan Eckert. Gentlemen, please stand.

Finally - I've saved the best for last – my family – my wife Mary, daughter Kim, and her husband Ed. Thank you for your love and support.

At every State of the County for the last four years, I have recognized a citizen who has made life better for the residents of Volusia County. Jimmy Huger was the first person I honored in 2008 with the Community Leadership Award, followed by Bill Dreggors, the late Tippen Davidson and last year, Dr. T. Wayne Bailey. Each of these individuals personifies the spirit of volunteerism and community service. This year, I am pleased to add to this list of community leaders Lesa France Kennedy with the International Speedway Corporation.

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DISTRICT 5

Lesa France Kennedy, the granddaughter of NASCAR founder ‘Big’ Bill France, has carried on her family’s legacy within the Daytona Beach and Volusia County community by remaining very active in a variety of initiatives. What’s truly impressive is that she does so while juggling her responsibilities as Chief Executive Officer and Vice Chairperson of the International Speedway Corporation and Vice Chairperson at NASCAR.

The France family name is known worldwide for the development of NASCAR, motorsports and of course, Daytona International Speedway. Here at home it is also synonymous with economic development, charitable giving and community involvement.

Named by Forbes as “The Most Powerful Woman in Sports,” Lesa is a champion for attracting new business to our community through her efforts on the CEO Cabinet. Lesa is also a major proponent of the arts, having supported the London Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach. And now, I would like to introduce Daytona Beach Mayor Glenn Ritchey who will say a few words.

It is an honor to be here today to present my eighth and final State of the County address. This occasion is truly bittersweet, as I will be termed out as Chair at the end of this year and I have worked with so many of the people I see here today.

The State of the County is our annual tradition of reviewing the accomplishments of the past year, and taking a look ahead to what we can expect in the future.

You know, I’ve gotten some good natured kidding for saying in every one of these speeches that the state of the county is good, and our community is stable and strong. Well, I won’t keep you in suspense – I’m getting ready to make it 8 in a row. The state of Volusia County *is* good. Our community *is* stable and strong.

Now, I bet you are thinking, hey Frank, come on! How can you say we are in great shape when this terrible recession just won’t end? When we face so many challenges here in Volusia County, as well as in the state and nation?

Here’s why I can make these statements: Because they are true! I believe we have one of the most stable, if not *the* most stable and professionally-run government in Florida. We have *not* cut services, we have *not* raised taxes and we have *not* laid off employees, as this would have only deepened the recession in our area. We have continued to reduce our expenses, and we’ve maintained our excellent credit rating. Our emergency reserves are in great shape. Yes, the state of Volusia County IS good.

Still not convinced? Okay, how about this: For decades, elected officials and citizens have talked about consolidating the 9-1-1 emergency call system. Last year, this longtime goal was finally achieved, with all dispatching services and EVAC brought under the umbrella of County government. This cuts costs, as well as vital seconds from the time it takes to respond to residents needing help.

And here’s more proof that we are in good shape: During the last five years, the County has cut ad valorem taxes from all taxing funds by more than \$39 million.

In a few minutes, I will show you a video that will highlight many of our accomplishments in 2011. But here’s the heart of the matter: the state of Volusia County is good because of our people. I have said many times that we live in an extraordinary place, with extraordinary people. Our residents and employees are hard working and innovative, our greatest strength and our most valuable resource. Every day as I’m out and about in our community, I see their talent and feel their energy. Take a look now at some of the ways we are tapping into this spirit to transform our community. After the video, I will have a few final remarks.

2011 was a year of transition and change for several of our lifesaving public safety services. One of the most significant milestones was the consolidation of emergency dispatching services under the County. The unification of the 9-1-1 communications system will provide a safer, more efficient service that will improve emergency response to our citizens and save millions of tax dollars.

The next major step in creating a fully integrated operation will be the construction of a state-of-the-art dispatch and Emergency Operations Center. At 45,000-square-feet, this facility will provide enough space for all communications staff and emergency management operations. The building has been one of County government's top capital needs since 2009, and we anticipate it opening next year.

EVAC ambulance also is now a part of County government, another big step forward in unifying emergency services. As a County division, EVAC integrated with Fire Services to provide emergency medical transportation countywide.

Bringing consolidated dispatching and EVAC into the County added 248 employees and \$24 million in extra costs to our organization. This dramatic jump in personnel and expenses should have drastically increased our operating expenses. Instead, the County's budget this year is *\$5 million less* than last year's, thanks to our ongoing efforts to find efficiencies and reduce expenditures.

Sheriff Ben Johnson played a lead role in unifying our public safety system, and we appreciate his vision and hard work in making this a smooth transition. Consolidated dispatch became part of his operations in 2011, making for a busy year for the Sheriff and his staff. His office expanded its jurisdiction, with Oak Hill joining Deltona, DeBary, and Pierson in contracting with the County for law enforcement services. The Sheriff also has been active in a community initiative targeting prescription drug abuse, and in a campaign to make roads safer for children walking to school.

We are very proud of Sheriff Johnson, who was recently elected President of the Florida Sheriff's Association. This marks only the second time in the Association's 118-year history that a Volusia County Sheriff has served as President.

An architectural firm has been selected for the \$6 million Branch Jail expansion, which will include new intake and administrative areas. This project will improve inmate medical care and programs and should be complete by early 2014.

Related improvements include the \$4 million construction of two new dormitories at the County's Correctional facilities. These will replace five barracks that have been used for inmate housing since 1983. We anticipate this renovation being finished by next summer.

Ensuring that the "World's Most Famous Beach" is also the world's safest beach is a major priority of the County Council. A new information campaign encourages beach drivers to park their cars, rather than cruise the shoreline. "Children playing" signs are prominently posted, along with signs identifying traffic-free zones and off-beach parking lots.

The full-sized trucks used by the Beach Patrol have been equipped with cameras to provide better visibility, and ATVs are being tested as possible alternatives to reduce the number of large vehicles.

The County Council's beach safety study was finished last year and posted on our website. Citizens were invited to review the study and submit comments, which the County Council will take into consideration.

In today's economy, the importance of creating new jobs and protecting existing ones cannot be overstated. This has been the focus of the County Council's economic development efforts, along with ensuring there are adequate facilities and suitable sites for future employment centers.

One of the ways we are growing successful new companies is through the Business Incubator, which opened at Daytona Beach International Airport. Part of the new Center for Innovation and Technology, the Incubator is just what it sounds like – a supportive environment for new companies with a high potential for growth. The program offers a variety of services and resources to accelerate progress for these businesses and make them profitable. As of December, six companies had been accepted to the Incubator, with six applications pending.

Managed by the University of Central Florida, the Business Incubator has the support of all five universities in Volusia County. This is a terrific way to involve our universities in creating innovative new companies that are likely to produce high paying jobs for the community.

The County's Economic Development Division also supports existing businesses by helping them grow and expand. Sen Pak, which manufactures robotic packaging equipment, is building a new facility at the County's industrial park. This 65,000-square- foot building at DeLand Crossings will employ about 65 people.

In Daytona Beach, ARK Technologies is building a 45,000-square- foot facility to manufacture auto parts for new cars. ARK anticipates employing at least 40 workers when it opens later this year in its new location on the Mason Avenue extension in Daytona Beach.

The Ocean Center hosted 90 events last year, a 10 percent increase from 2010. This included 23 groups that used our facility for the first time. More than 304,000 people attended the conventions, concerts and other events that were held here. These ranged from the Sesame Street Live show to singer Elton John to the American Public Works Association convention.

We want more people to know that the Ocean Center is a great location for an event, and Volusia County is a terrific place to visit. After getting input from local tourism leaders, the County Council chose a consultant to take a close look at how we market Volusia County. This independent study by the Strategic Advisory Group will analyze the tourism and convention marketing efforts of the three tourism advertising authorities and the Ocean Center. We look forward to getting those results later this year.

More people flew to or from Daytona Beach International Airport last year, with passenger traffic up 13 percent. The \$20 million rehabilitation of the main runway was finished, along with the installation of a new instrument landing system. This project was completed by a local paving contractor, creating hundreds of jobs for our community. And here's the best part – the Federal Aviation Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation picked up the tab for almost 98 percent of the cost, with the balance paid by the Airport.

Any discussion of the Airport would not be complete without including Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. The university has expanded its education and research facilities, finishing new soccer and softball fields along with several substantial capital improvements. These included the reconstruction and expansion of flight line maintenance and instructional facilities. Additional construction is continuing this year, with plans for a new interior circulation road, and a World Headquarters Center. This partnership with Embry Riddle benefits the university and the Airport, and provides local construction jobs for Volusia County residents.

Our commitment to making County government greener and more energy efficient has paid off handsomely. By leveraging County funds with a federal grant, improvements to County facilities save us approximately \$200,000 each year in electricity, water, and maintenance costs. Fuel costs have been cut by \$2.4 million since 2008, and the County fleet now includes about 250 flex-fuel or hybrid electric vehicles. These greener vehicles have increased fuel efficiency and reduced green house emissions.

The artificial reef program is another noteworthy green initiative, providing easily accessible sites for deep-sea fishing and diving off the County's coast. Area manufacturers donate concrete culverts and structures, which are hauled offshore and placed on the sea floor. The result is prime reef habitat, which will grow fish, shrimp and crabs for decades.

Last year, 20 new artificial reefs were created, bringing the total to 65 since the program was created in 1980. But of more significance is the fact that this program has kept more than 6,000 tons of concrete – *some 12 million pounds* – from winding up in the landfill. County port district dollars fund this effort, which provides jobs and moves money into local businesses, a win-win for the marine industry and the environment.

We pursued new technologies that allow the County to provide convenient and cost effective services through our website, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A web-based collection and billing system through the Revenue office lets property and business owners access their tax information and make payments online. Improvements to the Criminal Justice Information System, or CJIS, include a program that allows law enforcement agencies to better

manage how inmates are transported to court appearances.

Our Information Technology employees spearheaded many of these changes. They were also an essential part of the process to create new County Council districts, developing maps and providing support at public meetings. The County Council is required by its Charter to redraw its political boundary lines every 10 years to reflect changes in population. A plan for new voting districts was adopted by the County Council last year after much public input.

Volusia County is a beautiful community with an abundance of natural resources as well as recreational and cultural activities. Our citizens made good use of these amenities in 2011, visiting our parks and participating in programs and tours in record numbers. The Marine Science Center was visited by a record 62,000 people last year, a 21 percent increase from 2010. If you haven't visited the Center, what are you waiting for? The Stingray Touch Pool alone is worth the trip. This pool lets you touch stingrays as they swim in their giant aquarium, and it was a big hit with my grandson. The touch pool was added last year and funded entirely by donations from the Center's non-profit support group.

The Marine Science Center is also a busy animal hospital, with thousands of birds and hundreds of sea turtles brought in for emergency care. The University of Florida's Aquatic Medicine program now supplies the Center's veterinary services. This is a major step forward in our care of injured wildlife and an opportunity to develop more partnerships with UF.

Volusia County has an outstanding park system that attracts thousands of visitors who enjoy everything from sporting events and fishing to nature hikes and historic programs. To give you some idea how popular these facilities are, our ball fields were used by more than 168,000 people in 2011. We work hard at keeping our parks in tip-top shape, a challenging goal because there is less money available for maintenance and improvements. Last year, in response to requests from many residents in northeast Volusia, the County Council opened its third dog park – this one at Michael Crotty Bicentennial Park in Ormond Beach. These parks give man's best friend a safe place to run and play, and are very popular with our citizens.

Many of the County's environmental, cultural, historic and outdoor recreational facilities have been enhanced by the Volusia Echo program. Funded by a voter approved tax, this outstanding bricks-and-mortar grants program has added much to our quality of life, and we are very proud of all that has been accomplished.

Echo funding has also augmented our trail network to the tune of \$1 million annually. Six miles were added to the East Central Florida Regional Rail Trail in Southwest Volusia, expanding the County's trail network to almost 30 miles. These trails enhance Volusia's nature-based tourism and boost the local economy by drawing visitors who come to play and stay to enjoy our hotels, stores and restaurants. Trail projects planned for this year will extend the Spring to Spring Trail and the Rail Trail. Both systems are part of the St. Johns River to the Sea Loop, a 300-mile trail through five Florida counties.

Environmentally sensitive property once targeted for development became part of the Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve in 2011. The purchase of the 225-acre Stanaki tract using funds from Volusia Forever was a significant step in the County's goal of conserving land around Spruce Creek.

Approved by our citizens at the same time as Volusia ECHO, Volusia Forever is a nationally recognized program aimed at protecting water resource and outdoor recreation lands. With the acquisition of the Leffler Ranch in 2010, funding for this program has been depleted for any major purchases in the foreseeable future. But, I'm proud to report that since Volusia Forever's inception in 2001, 38,000 acres of conservation lands have been preserved at a cost of \$118.5 million. This includes almost \$40 million from the County's partnerships with federal, state and local agencies that are also committed to protecting our natural resources.

The Library is another County service that experienced an impressive number of visits in 2011 – more than 3.5 million! That's because our libraries do so much more than just loan books and movies. They are a wonderful community resource for people of all ages.

County libraries can provide up to date information on job searching as well as access to government services and forms. We have also gained many new “virtual” users who tap into our online databases or download audio and e-books.

Another service seeing an increase in users was Votran, the County’s public transportation system. Last year was the fourth year in a row that Votran’s ridership grew, and it also marked the start of downtown trolley service in Daytona Beach.

Transportation funding challenges have led to productive partnerships with Volusia cities and other public and private agencies to improve and maintain our infrastructure.

A prime example is the Dunn Avenue extension over Interstate 95, which opened last year. This almost \$7 million project was unique because of the multiple funding partnerships - federal, state, county, city and private - that pushed construction ahead by 10 years.

Another example is the County’s partnership with the City of New Smyrna Beach, which allowed the Turnbull Bay Bridge to reopen after it was closed last summer to prepare for structural repairs. Responding to concerns from residents and businesses, the County and the City paid for temporary repairs that will keep the bridge open until this fall, when it will close again to allow a replacement bridge to be constructed.

Of equal importance to our physical infrastructure is our social infrastructure. The County in 2011 changed how it awards funding for children and family services to allow us to stretch a limited amount of money as far as possible. The new funding process prioritizes the areas of greatest need, and determines which agencies or programs can best meet those needs. Community agencies are encouraged to collaborate and develop strategies to provide these services.

Affordable and available housing is critical to the health and wellbeing of Volusia families. Federal funding from the Neighborhood Stabilization program was used by the County to buy 35 foreclosed homes that were potential sources of blight in their communities. The homes were repaired and received energy efficient upgrades. Twenty three have been sold or are under contract to income-eligible first time homeowners.

Using this same funding source, the County partnered with the Haven Recovery Center to purchase 4 foreclosed houses that will be renovated into eight housing units. Haven Recovery Center, which provides substance abuse and mental health treatment, will rent them to very-low income households to provide safe, decent and affordable housing and help prevent homelessness.

Haven Recovery Center also manages the County’s substance abuse treatment program for inmates, which addresses the inter-related problems of drug abuse, mental illness and jail overcrowding. More than 245 people have successfully completed the two-month, in-jail component of the program and were released to community based treatment. Now in its third year, this program has offset more than \$1.1 million in jail costs, but more importantly, it provides participants with hope and the opportunity to become productive citizens.

Some 75,000 military veterans call Volusia County home, and meeting their needs is an ongoing priority. Our Veterans Services Division last year prepared more than 8,000 benefit claims and helped recover \$11.5 million in retroactive funds. We honor and appreciate the dedication and sacrifice of our military men and women, and we hope for their speedy and safe return.

Most of you know that I’m a positive person. I see the glass as half full and I always look for the silver lining. But I am by no means naïve about the challenges we face as a result of this economy. Too many people have lost their jobs and homes, their savings and retirements. Too many businesses have closed or are struggling to stay open. We continue to see record numbers of residents seeking help to pay for their rent, utilities, prescriptions and other necessities. We know our citizens are hurting, and we have stepped up efforts to make assistance available through a variety of programs and services.

And so our priority this year is to bring Volusia County back to prosperity. To do that, we need to put the people in our community back to work, and I believe we are off to a good start. Last month, ground was broken on the first

Sunrail station. This marks the long-awaited start of the 61-mile route that will stretch from DeLand through DeBary and on to Orlando and Osceola County. Thousands of our citizens will get jobs building the rail system, or working in the many shops and businesses that will develop around the rail stations.

Another boost to the economy is expected to come from two initiatives that were adopted by the County Council last year. The new, local preference ordinance gives local and regional companies an advantage in bidding for County contracts, and County road, fire and park impact fees were suspended for two years. Again, our goal is to create new jobs and jump-start residential construction.

Later this year, we expect to receive an analysis of the County's tourism and convention marketing efforts through an independent study by the Strategic Advisory Group. This will be an opportunity for us to learn how to work together more effectively to promote Volusia County as a prime vacation destination, and bring more visitors – and ultimately more jobs – to our area.

Now about those challenges... In previous speeches, I have said the day is coming when we would not have enough revenue to build new roads or repair and maintain existing ones. Well, that day is here. Funding sources can no longer keep up with road costs. Despite downsizing staff and reducing service levels, we have barely enough money to cover our road construction debt.

We will need to make sound decisions that allow us to plan for future infrastructure and protect our existing investments. Fortunately, we have good relationships with the cities as well as state and federal agencies and private developers. As you saw in the video, several infrastructure projects were completed last year as a result of these community partnerships. I believe working together will be the only way we will be able to provide the transportation system that is critical to our economy and quality of life.

As I noted earlier, the recession has had a devastating impact on so many of our citizens. Helping them get back on their feet is essential. The problem is we have substantially less money available for these programs, and the need is so great. Last month, I attended a forum on homelessness at Stetson University along with other elected officials and community leaders. I was troubled to learn how many homeless people live in Volusia County, but what I found most disturbing was the high number of homeless teenagers – as many as 2,000.

This is an issue that must be addressed as a community, and I am calling now for a second, follow up meeting on homelessness later in the year to review our progress.

As you know, I was the first elected County Chair in Volusia County and I have worked hard to define this job within the parameters of our Council/Manager form of government. I hope I have lived up to the expectations of our citizens. It certainly helps to have a progressive and forward thinking County Council who put the taxpayers first, and a hardworking and talented group of employees.

I don't know who the next County Chair will be, but I know that I will leave county government in great shape. This Council has honored its commitment to manage revenues with responsibility and restraint. We have used technology to improve our efficiency and effectiveness. We have created partnerships that have allowed us to stretch County dollars for the maximum benefit.

But....I'm not saying good bye just yet. This August, I will host a luncheon to review the eight years I have served as your County Chair. More information will be forthcoming later this year, and I look forward to sharing with you all that has been accomplished during my time in office.

I would like to close now as I began, by recognizing the importance of our citizens and how they shape Volusia County. Our future depends on our ability to work together as one community to tackle our challenges and seize new opportunities. As one community, we can grow our economy and achieve lasting financial stability. As one community, we can create a place that our children and grandchildren will be proud to call home. I look forward to all that we can accomplish together in 2012. Thank you for coming. God bless you, and God bless Volusia County.